

ARDA

12 may 1980

ARDA is an occasional and irregular publication of the North American Variant Bank-West, the central archive depository of the three autonomous Variant Banks of North America. It is published by the Custodian of NAVB-West, Rod Walker, "Alcala", 1273 Crest Dr., Encinitas CA 92024. The purpose of ARDA is to carry information on current NAVB holdings and activities, and to promote Diplomacy variants generally. This is Pandemonium Publication 696.

ARDA is sent free of charge to the following individuals: Custodians of NAVB-East and -North (Canada); Miller Number Custodian; Editor and Diplomacy Variant Rules Editor, DIPLOMACY WORLD; Custodians, U.K. & European Variant Banks; Hobby Archivist; Secretary, IVC. We will trade, but editors are warned that we are very irregular...our last issue was in January. Subscriptions are available: 5¢ per page plus postage & envelope. ARDA 1 may be obtained for \$1; #2 for \$1.10. We don't recommend #1 since #2 has our complete catalogue to date.

INQUIRIES are accepted from custodians on a priority basis. All others are on a time-available basis and must be accompanied by SASE (9x4).

PRICES quoted are in U.S. currency only. Anyone in Canada wishing to order games should go through NAVB-North (John Lipscomb, 1201 Osler St., Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, CANADA S7N 0T8). Our price for games is 10¢ per sheet, plus 50¢ handling for orders up to 20 sheets and \$1 handling for orders above 20 sheets. All orders are sent First Class. See ARDA #2.

CHANGES TO OUR CATALOGUE

The following games have been added:

ag04/02-19	Pre-Homeric Dip. / K. St. Andre	1	1
cb07/07	Quasi-Classical Dip. / M. Janta-Polczynski (w/Pseudo-C. D.)	2	2
cb08/07	Pseudo-Classical Dip. / M. Janta-Polczynski (<u>see</u> cb07/07)		
(F.)	<u>a. Kregen</u>		
fa01/08	Kregen / K. St. Andre	2	2
fn03/0n	Umbar / K. St. Andre	4	4
gh01/08	Colonia I / F. Hyatt	10	4
gh04/08	Colonia II / F. Hyatt	10	4
gh05/08	Colonia III / F. Hyatt	10	5
gh06/15	Colonia III-15 / R. Stimmel (*order w/Colonia III)	2*	2*
gh07/17	Colonial Winters / F. Winters (*not reproduceable; order from John Leeder pending NAVB Edition)	8*	9*
(L.)	<u>c. Central America</u>		
lc01/07	Central American Dip. / R. Fox	1	8
(P.)	<u>f. France</u>		
pf01/08	French Dip. / R. Fox	1	1
rb15/07	Diplowinn (Dafteur) / N. Nathan (w/Three-Handed Dip.)	0	1
rb16/07	Bridge Dip. / K. Baumeister	0	2
rd05/07	Deadman Dip. / B. Hyatt	0	2
(R.)	<u>k. Earlier & Pirated Versions</u>		
rk01/07	1961/1966 Rulebook [inquire]		
rk02/07	"1914" (Brazilian Variant; Portuguese Dip.) / Grow		
	Produtos (*English translation)	0	7*
rn07/07	Multiplicity II / K. Black	0	2
rs19/03	Three-Handed Dip. / E. Birsan (<u>see</u> rb15/07)		
rv10/07	Naval Dip. (Bloody Dip.) / K. Baumeister	0	3

ARDA 3

2.

sp07/06	Interstellar Conquest / L. Rubinow (*includes 1-sheet conference map)	3* 1
ud02/07	Fiat Lux / G. Costikyan	0 2
(U.)	<u>n. Hybrid Games</u>	
uh01/02	DiploChess / Birsan/Davis	0 2
uh02/04	Dip-Tac-Toe / F. Davis	0 1
(U.)	<u>n. No Board At All</u>	
un01/0n	Lizard / K. St.Andre	0 1
uu08/03-75	Amoeba / K. St.Andre/J.Walker	2 1
uu09/08	Sea Dip. / W. Johnson	2 3
uu10/09	Empire II / Johnson/St.Andre (*order w/uu05/10 rules)	4 1*
xm10/10	Youngstown Variant VI / Walker/Walkerdine (*inquire)	* *

NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Lew Pulsipher is now at 700 Morreene Rd., Apt. C-11, Durham NC 27705.

2. NAVBs Split. NAVB is no longer a single Bank with three branches. This Spring the three branch Bank custodians signed a Charter which splits the Bank into three autonomous institutions. In order to avoid overlap and disputes, the Charter defines the specific areas of responsibility for each Bank and provides for consultation and agreement on areas of mutual concern. NAVB-West will remain the main archive depository for North America, with NAVB-East as backup. NAVB-North, which may become the Canadian Variant Bank at its Custodian's discretion, will handle all orders for variants from Canadians. NAVB-East will control all inter-Bank relations between North America and overseas Banks. NAVB-West will continue to publish ARDA, and to assign NAVB Catalogue Numbers.

3. Miller Number Recategorization. It is the desire of the Miller Number Custodian, Greg Costikyan, to overhaul the MNs. This subject has been bruited about for years, both before and after Greg assumed the post. For a while, it appeared as if this matter might be turned over to an enormous committee. However, Greg has now stated that he wishes to use the NAVB Catalogue numbers as a basis for the new MNs. Basically, the MNs would use our numbers without the last part (/xx) which gives the # of players. Greg has asked Robert Sacks and me to settle any necessary details. This means that NAVB will no longer be restricting its numbers only to games in our active catalogue. Any variant which is, or has ever been, played postally will have a NAVB Number. ARDA 4 will probably contain a lot of updates generated by that change in policy. We did include all of the Colonia games in this issue as a starter.

4. Thanks. I want particularly to thank Robert Stimmel, Konrad Zaumeister, Fred Davis, Lew Pulsipher, and John Leeder for their help in obtaining many of the games added to our catalogue this issue. If I have forgotten anyone, please remind me & I'll be sure to thank you specifically in #4. I want it to be noticed that thus far I have had no occasion to thank one prominent name in variants, and that is Robert Sacks. I have, alas, had no assistance out of his presumably voluminous files. I can only express the hope that Robert has been pretty busy lately and that he might soon have the chance to turn his attention to the gaps in our archive and help us fill some of them.

5. My regular game in C&F may end soon. I've offered to GGM a variant instead. You may wish to watch the pages of C&F for this...it will (if Don accepts my proposal) a Middle-Earth game, Youngstown XII, Imperialism XV, or 2001.

THE MERCATOR GAMES

Stuart Dagger

[Back in 1976, in response to an inquiry, Stuart Dagger wrote a long letter, and a later supplement, to Fred Davis about the Mercator games. I am reproducing this material here, as it constitutes the best general discussion of these interesting global variants I know of. Some phrases are omitted as no longer relevant, and these are indicated by ellipses.]

Mercator was designed by Doug Wakefield.... His aim was to combine the fluidity of Abstraction with the size of Youngstown and to increase the risk factors so that the emphasis throughout is an attack and fast talking. As you know the later stages of a Youngstown game can be very tedious with set alliances and grinding stalemates.

Mercator I was a prototype, played FTF at one of the big cons and then withdrawn for amendments. The first postal version was Mercator II which was launched towards the end of 1974. As you see it is basically the Youngstown board filled out to a complete world map and with three new countries--U.S.A., Brazil, and Argentina. The convoy rule is your Abstraction one but with the TS1-TS2-TS3 innovation which makes the A/Fs much harder to stymie. The other novelty is the set of the victory criteria. The numbers are close enough together for it to be difficult to tell who is going for what and with whom, and so you can't let up on the diplomacy in the second half of the game. The numbers are also such that as you turn into the home straight there tend to be still 5 or 6 countries in with a shout and so you get exciting finishes.

There were two postal games of Mercator II -- both successful. The design is still current, because there are a few people who prefer it to the later versions. However the basic game is now Mercator III. In this Doug strengthened Germany and Russia a little, increased the convoy options and introduced the idea of aligned neutrals. For example, Laos is not a supply center but Germany can build there, a fact which gives her some diplomatic leverage. Each country has one such neutral, and the general effect is to increase the interaction between countries. One game of MIII has finished, I know of three in play, and there are a couple of waiting lists with 8-9 names on. The one that has finished saw the closest finish yet. India and Japan had had a successful campaign and were heading for the 2-way when India stabbed his ally and went for the bigger prize. Japan rallied, teamed up with Austria and France, and as India hit 29 they reached 22-19-19 and closed him out! See what I mean about the risks?

My game of MII finished in a 3-way (Britain, Argentina, Turkey) and in that I had to do some careful counting and risk weighing towards the end. I was the biggest power but couldn't get the final stab to come past 28-29 and so rejected it and settled, since there too there were still enough large countries for a combination to have taken me from behind.

[Mercator] III½ is a jokers-wild sort of game. Fun to play once but not really to be taken seriously. There are two in play--one with aircraft! The aircraft rule is an option which exists with all the games. They are then designated IIA, IIIA, etc. I don't care for the rule too much myself, but there are plenty of people to disagree.

Mercator IV introduces a 14th country (Scandinavia) and increases the A/F options again. The main point as I see it is to allow 7-player games, with each player taking one of the basic seven countries plus one other. There are two ways of doing this. In Mercator SF you have a pre-game bidding session (see the rules for the way this works); in Mercator SF-WNS the extra

[THE MERCATOR GAMES]

countries are assigned by the GM and this is done secretly so that while you know your second country no one else does. I know of one IVA and one SF-WNS in play.

Finally there is Mercator V, which has just been launched and for which an invitation game has been set up. No new innovations here.* ([Stuart then notes:] *not quite true--see forward builds rule.) What Doug has done is to take IV and try to strengthen Brazil and increase the strategic options open to Scandinavia. The point about Brazil is that in all the versions II-IV it has tended to suffer from the "U.S.A. in Atlantica" problem. While not denying that there is a Brazilian problem in these earlier versions, I don't think it is quite as serious as some people have made out since in all the games so far the country has been played by a weaker player than either Argentina or U.S.A. So naturally they have tended to go down. In the Mercator I playtest the country did well.

Mercator II and III seem to have a natural length of about 7-8 "years" (i.e., Jan. 1890 - Dec. 1891) and I should think IV and SF would be the same. Mercator V might take a little longer but still no more than the average game of regular. All of them are fast moving with plenty of action. ...

[Supplement: Replying to a letter from Fred Davis:]

I tend to agree with you that the MII movement rule [for A/Fs] is the best but that the other innovations in MIII were improvements. ... I also share your dislike of the aircraft rule for precisely the reason you state, the tactics are swamping the game and what should be the most important part, the diplomacy, is beginning to get lost.

Diplomatic plusses in the game which you don't mention--probably because they don't really become apparent until you play--are the number of players and the continuous nature of the map. 13/14 players sounds a lot but is manageable in practice and does mean that you always have room for diplomatic manoeuvre. The game doesn't solidify into fixed alliances in the way that even Youngstown tends to. The lack of corners, corridors, and "seams" (such as the Youngstown E-W boxes) also means that your enemy always has someone on the other side of him to give him cause for worry and you cause for hope.

The 7-8 "year" length is caused partly by the use of multiple VCs [victory criteria], partly by the fact that the strong A/Fs speed up the action by shifting the emphasis towards attack, and partly by the shortness of the finishing straight. From five countries on the 15/16 mark to those on 20 is a short step; at Youngstown the win has to be ground out, from "winning" at 20 to won at 37.

... Samson-Flansteed, incidentally, is nothing to do with the "authors" of the variation. Doug has a liking for silly names and this is another of them. His press, letters, and game reports are littered with the likes of Sir Herbert Gusset, Orlando Clagg, and Brig-Genl Knatchbull Hughes-Smyth. He is the most unlikely chartered accountant I have ever met. A great bloke, the British game would be a lot duller without him.

The WNS in SF-WNS stands for "With Nastier Stabs".

THE CLINE NINE-MAN GAMES

There are to my knowledge four extant versions of Bob Cline's game, numbered in various fashions in various places from I to V. Different individuals have been listed as responsible for the different versions. This confused situation is made worse by the fact that Hal Naus' 9-man game, which is similar to Cline's, was assigned a Miller Number as a Cline game.

[THE CLINE NINE-MAN GAMES]

Hopefully we can clear up the confusion...although there is always the possibility that I am also confused. The documentation on all this isn't too clear. But, hopefully,....

Bob Cline designed his 9-man game in 1966. I've heard "1965", but I believe Bob did the design right before he began to run a postal section of the game, which would then put it in 1966. Bob did the map by taping a piece of white paper over the board's lower part, redrawing the land outlines, and putting in the new spaces, centers, and countries. You can tell the original Cline version easily: the Spanish coastline seems to run a little wild and finally peter out in the middle of the Gulf of Lions.

Nine-man games were the rage in 1966. There were no less than four of them being played at the time, designed by Bob, Hal Naus, Don Miller, and Jack Chalker (yes, the same guy who now writes sf & runs Mirage Press). Many players wanted to get more people in the game and "round off" the board. This was long before the days of Youngstown and global monsters like Mercator and Colonia.

Adding two more powers to the board is no real problem...there are four possibilities which can be experimented with in various combinations: Spain, Scandinavia, North Africa, and the Middle East. Bob opted for the last two, adding "Barbary States" and "Persia". He began running his game in a sort of one-sheet 'zine which he never named. It came to be called NAME, and ran for only a few issues, after which the game passed to Hal Naus as GM with a pretty thorough reshuffle of the players as well. (It was the first variant I ever played in. I didn't like it.)

So much for Cline I.

Conrad von Metzke, a good personal friend of Bob's, decided to revive the game in 1972, which he did. He started a new 'zine, appropriately called RENAME, to house the game. He published a thorough edition of the rules...insofar as I can tell, identical with the original...and copied the old map rather than make a new one.

We move now to Cline II. The rules and maps for this were published in RENAME 12, 11 August 1973, with a text which implies there may have been an earlier publication. A few modifications have been made in the basic game...Persia's home center in Iraq moved to Arabia,

This same version was published in DIPLOMACY WORLD 17, Autumn 1977. Conrad's notes are not, I believe, completely accurate. First, he states that several people were involved in the redesign. It may be true that he communicated with many people back in 1972-73 about the game, but there can be no doubt that the person responsible for the 1973 edition and redesign was Conrad von Metzke. We are otherwise faced with the peculiar situation that there are fewer changes in the game than there were people responsible for them.

Second, Conrad states that this is the third version of the Cline game. This statement seems clearly in error. It may be that Conrad is counting the Naus 9-man game--which, as I've said, resembles Cline's--as the second version. That would then tally. However, otherwise there does not appear to have been any version of the Cline game intermediate between the 1966 and 1973 editions.

The numbering of Cline III & IV in our catalogue should be reversed, but we'll let that go for now. Cline III was published as "V" by Fred Davis in 1977, after the DW edition had appeared. Fred's count of versions was: 1966 version as I, 1973 version as II, 1977 edition as III, and Mick Bullock's version (which we'll discuss shortly) as IV. Fred's version, again, makes

[THE CLINE NINE-MAN GAME]

minor adjustments in the board and the rules. The Davis version is also probably the most playable version of the Cline game.

This brings us to Cline IV, the Mick Bullock version. In 1973 Conrad sent a copy of Cline I to Mick, editor of 1901 AND ALL THAT. Mick printed this in July 1973. Now, this date is essential to my argument that there is no intermediate version between Cline I and Cline II. Mick obviously got a copy of Cline I, which he printed only 2 weeks before RENAME 12 came out with Cline II.

Mick states that Cline designed the game in 1965 (which I believe is not so) and that the version he prints represents revisions by Hal Naus and Conrad von Metzke. This brings up the question, again, as to whether the Naus 9-man game was really simply Cline's game...but we don't seem to have any particular information on it. However, it would appear that the edition published by Conrad in 1972, and sent to Mick in 1973, was the original Cline game without revisions either by Hal or Conrad.

Anyway, Mick interpreted some things differently and wound up with a different. He dropped the Sea of Azov (as in Cline II), but kept the Persian home center in Iraq (as in Cline I). He allowed units to cross directly from Morocco to Spain (as in neither). Turkey starts with F Smy.

This hybrid version is noted as Cline IV in our catalogue.

Hopefully, anyone with further information on this subject will contact us. We may ultimately have to redo our entire cataloguing of this set of games, but at the moment, that's how things stand.

A BASIC REPERTORY OF VARIANTS

Variants are not very popular these days. I do not believe this is because players do not like variants, but is due to other causes. The primary one is lack of information. Outside of DW, and of course the specialized variant 'zines, variants get very little PR.

Conversely and paradoxically, another cause is too much information. Or, rather, too many variants. There are hundreds of them. How does a player know which one(s) he ought to be interested in, where to get it/them, where to play it/them?

Another problem is the narrow focus of most variant GMs. Most of them are designers and are primarily interested in running their own variants. I believe that only Youngstown is a notable exception to being so restricted, as several GMs offer it or run sections. Colonia has also spread out some from its home 'zine, too, I believe.

I am therefore of the opinion that we are going to create a bigger market for variants in general by focussing our effort on certain variants, some of the best and most interesting ones.

First, I would like your suggestions and comments on the dozen or so variants which, to you, are the best, most interesting, and most playable. Try for variety: a Middle-Earth game, a 9-man game, a regular board revision, a couple of different global games; try for a range of different numbers of players.

Second, with your help, I'll try to compile a standard set of the best variants, and perhaps get the whole set printed in a standard edition which could be sold inexpensively.

Third, I'll see about getting a demo variant game in DW. From point of view of space and general interest, it will probably be a Middle-Earth game.

COMMENTS, PLEASE.

END. Whole cost of this issue: 50¢.